

[Anna Potter Davis]

Marie Carter

Anthony, N.M.

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OLD TIMERS STORIES

Mrs. Anna Potter Davis (Husband; Charles F. Davis)

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Mrs. Charles F. Davis, the wife of one of Anthony's most successful business men, told me in a confidential manner:

" Sometimes I close my eyes and visualize the Mesilla Valley as it looked when I moved here with my parents from Weir, Kansas in 1898, but when I open my eyes the vision has vanished. Perhaps it is just as well for at that time there wasn't much to boast about."

" The day our family arrived in Anthony R. C. Bailey met us at the station. There were only a few houses and they were so far apart that my brother, Volney, wanted to know where the town was.

" The Rio Grande was very wide and very high and so strong and swift that the sticks we tossed into it were carried down stream in a twinkling.

" When R. C. Bailey, son of old doctor Bailey, told us that he was going to ferry us across the river, we, meaning us kids, thought he meant fairy. I was just dying to ask him about it, but in those days children were trained not to quiz grown up folks. So I held my peace--at

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least for the time being. Anyway we were at the peak of thrill-dom when he helped us into his new skiff. [C. 18 - 17 ?]

" Poor Volney I could see by the way he clutched the sides of the boat he was more scared than us girls. Finally we got out of the boat and 2 got into a buggy and were driven to Chamberino by a Mexican with a large sombrero that tickled us to giggles. At Chamberino we lived in a large red brick house, built by the [Morleys?], a well to do family from the east. It was the most modern house in the valley.

" Father found farming to be a bigger job than he expected it to be. For he had been a mining man for years and knew very little about agriculture. The first year he worked hard but ran short of making a living to the extent of eight hundred dollars.

" In the old days land was cheap anywhere from three to ten dollars an acre, but it took lots of time and hard work to clear it as most of the valley was bosque or woodland. We used to attend the Methodist church at Berino, the only church, with the exception of the Catholic church, between El Paso and Las Cruces.

" One of our chief amusements at the church gatherings were candy pulls. The boys never failed to come because they delighted to stick the warm taffy into the girls' long hair. And the only way to remove the candy was to cut off some of the hair.

" The first school I attended was a one room affair at Chamberino. Miss Helen Morley was the teacher and she taught several grades in one room. The floor was packed dirt and the benches were crude hard seats without a back rest of any kind. We used slates and pencils, too. There was a big tin pail of water with a tin dipper floating in it. The pail set on a box in a corner and when it was empty one of the larger boys took it out to the hand pump and refilled it.

We had lots of picnics, dances, barbecues and horseback riding in the old days. We didn't have a variety of diversions like the young folks have 3 to-day, but I am quite sure we

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enjoyed ourselves just as much. We didn't know very much about such things as dates, for the young men called at the homes of the eligible young ladies. Taking long rides with a young man without a chaperon just wasn't done. Hay rides well chaperoned were included in our amusements, too. Sometimes it took several wagons piled high with hay to accomodate the crowd. Each wagon had two or three older women for chaperons.

We had lots of fun jogging along in the moonlight with our legs swinging over the sides of the wagon with everybody singing the popular songs of the day; some in tune but most of them out of tune. As a rule the largest and invariably the fattest boy in the party would have a high squeaky tenor, and some little scrawny fellow would have a deep baritone or bass. The boys would always bring their guitars, mandolins, harmonicas and banjos along. There is one thing I was always ashamed of; it was the stolen watermelons. But boys will be boys.

" We were always permitted to go with the boy we liked best and sit next to him on a hay ride, but the nearest we ever got to making love or necking as they do now was when some boy, under cover of hay, squeezed a girl's hand. Some of the bolder ones did steal an occasional hug or a kiss but only when the chaperon had gone star gazing. This rarely ever happened, however, for the old time chaperon made it her special duty to watch her charges with an augus eye.

" Girls used to take a great deal of pleasure in showing off their cooking to their boy friend, especially their homemade candies, and cakes. Many a boy and prospective husband was entertained in the kitchen while mother and dad and the rest of the family occupied themselves in the parlor. On winter evenings the boy usually helped to pull the candy, and whip the eggs for a cake. And when we made ice cream they always chopped the ice 4 and turned the handle of the ice cream freezer.

" The old-fashioned Sunday dinner was wonderful. Sometimes two or three families would drive in on Sunday and remain for dinner. There would be several vehicles outside the

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house. If that happened now days the neighbors would think there was going to be a funeral and want to know who had died.

" We were always prepared for company on Sunday, for all of the bread, pies, cakes doughnuts and cookies were baked on Saturday. And if we were going to have a Virginia baked ham that was usually baked the day before, too. we had a long table and on Sunday every seat was occupied. Sometimes we would have baked chicken with dressing and gravy.

We raised our own vegetables and when dinner was served we had a variety of summer squash, mashed potatoes, yellow snap beans, green Kentucky wonders, lettuce with homemade French dressing, Indian relish, fresh tomatoes, sliced cucumbers and candied sweet potatoes. we always had two kinds of pie, white layer cake, yellow loaf cake, cookies and doughnuts. Our country butter, eggs, milk and cream were always fresh.

" After dinner the men would go out on the porch to smoke, the children would go outside to play and the women would clear the table, and enjoy a good gossip while they washed and dried the dishes. When we left Chamberino we went to La Mesa to live--in the same house my brother Volney Potter occupies at the present time. My father, Darwin Potter, was a brother to Pearl Bailey's mother, and Pearl Bailey is a son of Dr. Bailey who used to practice at Chamberino.

" I have lived in the valley since I was ten years old, consequently I have seen many changes. Some people think that the building of the Elephant Butte dam was the greatest event in the history of the Mesilla Valley. But 5 there is something that meant a great deal more to me," Mrs. Davis said. "It was the time they built a bridge strong enough to resist the Rio Grande and to really stay put[.?]"

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Mrs. Anna Potter Davis was born at [Weir?] Kansas; June 7, 1886. Her father was Darwin Potter and her mother was Annetta Cochran Potter. She attended school at Chamberino and continued her education in the public shools of Dona Ana County, and then attended the New Mexico State College at Mesilla Park, New Mexico. She is the wife of Charles Fields Davis, prominent business man of Anthony, New Mexico. Mr. Davis is the owner and manager of the Valley Implement Company of Anthony.